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ABSTRACT

This study identified the second language acquisition, culture shock, and language stress of adult Latinas in New York as related to language, culture, and education. Participants were eight adult Latinas, for whom Spanish was the first language, who had come to the United States 10-15 years previously and developed some functioning English as a Second Language (ESL) skills. They were enrolled in an ESL program for adults. Researchers administered surveys and interviews and examined the women's essays and records. Results indicated that women's attitudes made a difference in their language proficiency. Being in an ESL classroom influenced their linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences. Respondents indicated that their native culture and traditions had profoundly impacted their study habits. All of the women cared about English performance and mastery of English language skills. Program involvement was key to women's expectations versus the reality of success. Actions the women took to learn English included going to the library to get books, watching television, listening to tapes, reading newspapers, speaking with Americans, and imitating teachers' pronunciation. Respondents felt isolated when they first immigrated, and deterrents to learning English included being in mixed level classes, fear of speaking, fear of ridicule, and lack of child care. (Contains 51 references.) (SM)

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SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION, CULTURE SHOCK AND LANGUAGE STRESS OF ADULT LATINA STUDENTS IN NEW YORK

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Second Language Acquisition, Culture Shock and Language Stress of Adult Latina Students in New York

While there is no one accepted definition of ESL literacy, ESL literacy teaching could be defined as supporting adults with little English and little formal education in their efforts to understand and use English in its many forms (oral and written, including prose, document, and quantitative literacy), in a variety of contexts (family, community, school, work), so that they can reach their fullest potential and achieve their own goals, whether these be personal or academic. In ESL literacy, the relationship between past experiences and present reading deserves special consideration since much of what is written in the United States presumes a certain cultural and linguistic knowledge that the ESL learner does not yet have. Experience must be meaningful to the learner; the learner must be free to look at experience; goals must be set and pursued by the learner. Adults learn continually and informally as they adjust to role changes and other adaptations (Banks, 1997a, 1997b, King, 2000, Knox, 1977, Tennant & Pogson, 1995).

Adults' learning achievements are, however, thought to be modified by individual characteristics. Prior learning experiences have the potential to enhance or interfere with new learning. Knox (1977) said, in an optimistic vein, that "almost any adult can learn anything they want to, given time, persistence and assistance" (p. 469). In the most commonly cited definition, that of Knowles (1975), self-directed learning is defined as a process in which individuals take the initiative in designing learning experiences, diagnosing needs, locating resources, and evaluating learning.

There is not much research done on adult ESL literacy among females. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the second language acquisition, culture shock and language stress of adult Latina females in New as they relate to the variables of language, culture and education of adult Latina females. There have been insufficient examinations of the assumptions underlying the content and aims of survival English instruction; especially the question of whether the programs are designed to serve the needs of the learners (Cervantes & Castro, 1988). Adult ESL learners are faced with problems of controlling linguistic rules and also of applications in various situations while

attempting to deal with the shock of living in a new cultural environment.

Background

The need for continuing education activities for women has been expressed in a variety of ways. They may be justified as a means to address transitions and to provide information concerned with new research into biological and psychological development. Other programs may also be required to examine, from a woman's point of view, areas that are believed to have been treated historically from a male's perspective (Holt, 1980; Long, 1975). The need to separate programs on topics such as legal status and financial matters may decline, according to Holt (1980) and Long (1975).

Educational experiences refer to the difficulties encountered by limited English proficient adults who are acquiring both a second language and initial literacy in a classroom setting (D'Anglejan, Renaud, Arsenault, & Lortie, 1984). Linguistic experience refers to the process of literacy consciousness as one where people must become aware of their day-to-day conditioning in order to build a strong foundation for their role in society

(Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Freire, 1973; Ramirez, 1994). Cultural adjustments refer to the situations where people attempt to deal with the shock of living in a new cultural environment, one that is confusing and sometimes hostile (de Castell & Luke, 1987; Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1987; Ogbu, 1978).

The participants for this study were eight adult Latina females who came to the United States 10 to 15 years ago and developed some functioning ESL skills. The participants were native Central American and Caribbean females who spoke Spanish as their first language and who were enrolled in an ESL program for adults. They are adult females in the age range of 29 to 39. The procedures used in the current investigation are interviews, essays, questionnaires and examination of academic records. Participants were asked to write an essay in either English or Spanish describing their lives as immigrant women in New York. The mode of the questionnaire (given in either English or Spanish) was 11 or 12 non structured questions.

The study addressed the following questions:

1. Why do some Latina females within the same socioeconomic levels, years spent in the United States and similar levels of English proficiency perform better than other Latino students?

2. How does the linguistic environment influence Latino students' English performance?

3. How does Latino culture impact on students' English performance?

4. How do educational factors influence Latino students' English performance?

5. Does the concept of language learning strategy reflect real actions that women believe they take to learn English as a second language?

6. What special contributions can participants make to the understanding of social and effective learning strategies?

7. In participants' expressions of personal experience, what beliefs are indicated about what it means to be an adult immigrant in New York?

8. Do low literate adults use reading or writing skills to complement other learning, either about human relations or about technical skills?

9. How do participants set about improving literacy skills and what strategies do they use?

10. What force would motivate them to improve literacy and which would deter them?

11. How would literacy fit in with other learning motivations?

Educational Experiences of Adult English as a Second Language Latina Females:

Students in adult ESL classes differ dramatically in their linguistic, cultural, educational, and employment backgrounds, and

in the knowledge, skills, and information they bring to the adult ESL classroom. They also differ in their exposure to and experience with various aspects of American education and employment (Bartlett & Vargas, 1991; Carrrasquillo, 1994; Haverson, 1991). They may be recently arrived refugees, immigrants who have been here for several years, or long-term residents whose families have lived in the United States for generations. They must possess skills that will transfer readily to available jobs or they may have skills that could be highly marketable if adapted to their new environment (Sylvester & Carlo, 1995; Walter, 1994). They also differ in their command of oral English; they may be able to speak a few words of English, to converse socially but not function well as students or workers using English, or be quite fluent speakers but lack reading, writing, and study skills they need to proceed with their education (Carrasquillo, 1994; Crandall, 1993; Fingeret, 1992).

The following figures are especially important because of the demographics of the population in this study. According to Numbers and Needs (1997), one fourth of all foreign-born people in the United States of America in 1996 (about 6.7 million) were born in Mexico. Whites, including Latinos, constituted nearly two

thirds of the 1990-1996 immigrants. About 43% of the immigrants were Latinos of all races (Numbers and Needs, 1997). More than 7 million Latinos age 16 and older – 50% of all Latino adults – are functionally illiterate, according to statistics published in SER America (1989).

Linguistic Experiences of Adult English as Second Language Latina Women

A major challenge is to provide support services that enable adults to participate in the program and apply the results of their instruction. Adult ESL classes, while important, are only one part of an effective ESL program, which may also involve instruction or employment training. An effective program may also require child care and transportation if adults are able to participate and services such as job development, employment counseling, or academic counseling, if the ESL instruction is to be truly functional. In adult ESL "one size does not fit all", that is, if they are to truly serve their diverse students (Quigley, 1992; Wrigley, 1993).

The diversity of programs and program providers can be bewildering for an adult ESL learner attempting to create a

sequence of classes. Even within a program, it is not always clear when a learner is ready to progress from one level to another, and the problem is compounded when learners move from one program or service to another. Part of the marginalization of adult ESL also stems from the unempowered status of ESL students (Auerbach, 1991) whose lack of English and literacy often prevents them from participating fully in mainstream, academic, social, or economic life.

Cultural Experiences of Adult English as Second Language Hispanic Women:

Theorists like Apple (1979), Brookfield (1991), Chevalier (1994), Giroux (1983a, 1983b), and Wrigley and Guth (1992) saw schools not only as cultural agents but as political sites. ESL programs that emphasize this orientation tend to address the issues of power and control on both the classroom and program levels. In an effort to equalize the power differential that exists between teachers and students, liberationist programs attempt to set up educational opportunities that put adults in charge of their own learning. Teachers saw themselves not so much as experts from whom all knowledge emanates but rather as facilitators and co-

learners with different kinds of experiences and different resources at their disposal (Horsman, 1990; Wrigley, 1993). However, sociopolitical issues such as AIDS education in the schools, the pressure on teenagers to join immigrant youth gangs, and sexual harassment in the workplace increasingly find their way into the ESL literacy curriculum, even in programs where a life skills focus predominates. From adult learning theory comes the view that adults must be treated as people with complex individual histories, responsibilities, needs, and goals (Creason, 1992; Haverson, 1991; Knowles, 1975). The tasks that an adult learner must perform in everyday life have increasingly become the focus of curriculum development (Grognet & Crandall, 1982). Survival curricula must be examined in terms of how well they live up to the goals of being situationally and communicatively realistic. As Albertini (1993), Cole (1992), and Taylor (1982) pointed out, what is labeled reality in the language classroom may not in fact be reality. What is excluded from curricula is as important in shaping students' perceptions of reality as what is included (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Haverson, 1991).

These themes give meaning to language being learned and lead to richer and more extensive language use. Later, when

academic goals become evident, content needs to be less relevant to learners' personal interests and more tied to community, national, and international themes. Adults learn best and remain in programs longest when they participate in establishing their own educational goals (Brod, 1990). Programs that use a variety of strategies and techniques to access the differing learning styles, previous educational experience, and multiple skill levels present in most adult ESL classes will have a greater chance of meeting the educational needs and expectations of the individual learners within the class (Crandall & Peyton, 1993; Shank & Terrill, 1995). Table One represents the distributions of subjects for the variables of places they came from. The variables are: age, number of years lived in the United States, New York State Placement Score (1983), and occupation.

Table One
Participants Demographic Data:

Participant	Age	Birthplace	New York State Placement Score	Years in United States	Occupation
Corina	35	Dominican Republic	3	14	Waitress
Sylvia	33	Guatemala	4	20	Housewife
Eva	39	Dominican Republic	3	12	Teacher's Aide
Elvira	39	Mexico	4	11	Housewife
Ana	30	Dominican Republic	2	13	Housewife
Eneida	31	Puerto Rico	4	20	Student
Carmen	34	Puerto Rico	4	16	PTA President
Cruz Maria	29	Honduras	2	5	Home Attendant
Averages	33		3.25	13.8	

Note. N=8

Analysis of the Data

The researcher monitored data in order to identify patterns and describe factors that impacted on participants' language acquisition, culture shock and language stress of adult Latina students in New York. In this study, the researcher identified, summarized, and contrasted essays, interviews, and questionnaires.

Table 2:
Linguistic Factors Contributing to English Language Acquisition
N=(8)

Interview	f	Essay	f	Questionnaire	f
Going to an English School	14	Going to the doctor	11	Speaking Spanish	8
Looking up the words in the dictionary	13	Speaking to children's teacher	10	Understanding English music well	8
English being the language of the USA	11	Purchasing English cassettes	9	Understanding TV programs in English	8
Getting a job in the USA	9	Using English to interpret cookbooks	8		

Table 3:
Cultural Factors Contributing to English Language Acquisition
(N= 8)

Interview	f	Essay	f	Questionnaire	f
Adjusting to Anglo-Saxon Culture	11	Feeling embarrassed due to not knowing English	21	Watching TV programs in English	8
Having American friends	9	Indispensable for survival	16	Watching TV programs in Spanish	8
Feeling helpless in Anglo-Saxon culture	8	Being able to find a job I like	8	Shopping in Latin stores	8
Being discriminated against because of accent (Spanish)	8				

Table 4:
Educational Factors Contributing to English Language Acquisition
(N=8)

Interview	f	Essay	f	Questionnaire	f
Being able to help children with homework	11	Reading books	13	Studying English intensively	8
Having a good teacher	10	Translating	10	Studying English to take GED test, computer classes, etc.	8
Adjusting to American culture	9	Getting a job	10	Reading in Spanish	8
Reading children's books	8	Practicing in English	10	Thinking in Spanish	8
Being bilingual	8	Taking USA citizenship test	9	Writing in Spanish	8

Findings

The findings of the study are summarized in conjunction with the research questions posed in this study:

1. Why do some Latina females within the same socioeconomic levels, years spent in the United States, and similar levels of English proficiency perform better than other Latina students? Some Latina females perform better than others because of their positive attitudes towards learning. Participants reported more effort toward the goal of acquiring English-language proficiency. The majority of the participants affirmed the importance of education with emotional support and positive encouragement from the ESL program. Participants' responses provided additional information. One participant said: "I had to adjust to American culture because no matter where you go, English is indispensable".

2. How does the linguistic environment influence Latina participants' English performance? Each participant in this case was born into a Spanish language society (Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, Puerto Rico and The Dominican Republic), and was reared in this environment for the first two decades of her life. Each of the participants had never had any formal English language instruction before coming to the United States. Each participant had grown up in a Spanish-language society and had lived in the United States for roughly the same number of years at the time of this study. The purpose of attending an ESL program was to acquire the English language. The English-language environment became a crucial element toward the academic success of Hispanic students and being in an English as a second language classroom influenced their linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences toward the United States and toward learning. One participant said: "For example, I don't speak my language when I go to Manhattan. I speak Spanish with my sister in the Bronx only."

3. How does Latino culture impact on participants' English performance? Respondents indicated that the culture and traditions of their native country had a profound impact upon their study habits. Essays, interviews, and questionnaires revealed that participants spent time with other Latinos, children, and family members doing their homework, and reading English language literature with other personal challenges. One participant said: "'I went to school because I did not want my children to say: Mommy doesn't understand what I tell her. That's why I became interested in learning English".

4. How do educational factors influence Latino participants' English performance? Every participant cared about English performance as well as mastery of English language skills. However, according to participants' responses, a key component between the expectation and reality of participants' success centered around the impact of program involvement, especially

their teacher and understanding in times of academic difficulty, the participants' English performance improved. One participant said: "Here in New York, English is used to work, to earn more money, to move around throughout the country. At the gym and at the school, they always use English."

5. Does the concept of language learning strategy reflect real actions that women believe they take to learn English as a second language? Participants' real actions to learn English included going to the library with their children to get books related to their school learning; they watched TV in English, listened to tapes, and imitated the teachers' pronunciation. They spoke to Americans, read newspapers, and used all kinds of gained experience and knowledge when they had to go to the hospital, post office, answer the phones, read letters, and fill out job applications. One participant said: "My teacher says, 'yeah, right' all the time; now I use that expression a lot."

6. What special contributions can participants make to the understanding of social and effective learning strategies? Respondents indicated that being with "Americans" helped them to understand the culture and the language, reading about things in which they were interested helped them learn better. Field trips to museums, taking the trains, and reading maps gave them the courage to go to the same places again with their spouses and/or children. One participant said: "If I go to a place and they don't understand my English, that will motivate me to learn more".

7. In participants' expressions of personal experiences, what beliefs are indicated about what it means to be an adult immigrant in New York? Participants expressed feelings of isolation during the first few years of living in New York. They all lived in the South Bronx and they were worried about crime, drug addiction, and violence. They stated how difficult it was to be a single mother living on public assistance. They also realized that besides English, they needed to acquire other

educational skills in order to survive and succeed in New York City. One participant said: "In the field of cosmetology, there aren't many people that know how to speak Spanish. I was forced to learn it since African Americans don't speak any Spanish at all."

8. Do low literate adults use reading or writing skills to complement other learning, either about human relations or about technical skills? Although not all participants were completely literate in their own language, all participants expressed that learning experiences with life and decision making are a strong foundation for their learning. Participants used reading and writing to help them with their daily life activities and learning challenges. One participant said: "Another way I use English is to watch TV in English using caption and I would copy the strange words and look them up in the dictionary."

9. How do participants set about improving literacy skills and what strategies do they use? The majority of participants indicated that in order to improve their literacy skills, they do their homework with their children, they watch TV programs with their children. They go to Manhattan and listen to English-proficient speakers, they go shopping in American stores, and they read books recommended by the instructor. One participant said: "If I pay attention and study, I can read and write better. I get excited when I see that I am learning something. For example, I took the government test that had sixty (60) questions and I was very satisfied with my score of ninety-five (95)".

10. What force would motivate them to improve and which would deter them? Among the "forces" that helped participants improve literacy were: helping their children with their homework, being able to answer the phone, being able to read the mail, and being able to speak with English-speaking professionals. Participants listed the following strategies: They drew pictures, they memorized words, listened to tapes, sang songs, took pictures to create biographies, and read children's'

literature. Among the deterring factors were: being in mixed-level classes, fear of speaking, fear of ridicule, lack of child care, classes being too difficult, and programs being too demanding by not offering flexibility in scheduling. One participant said: " I look up the definitions of the words that I hear daily and that I do not understand and little by little I familiarize myself with some of those words".

11. How would literacy fit in with other learning motivations? Learning English would open doors due to the demand of bilingual workers in New York City and ESL classes would enable them to aspire to a higher educational degree and it would also enable them to leave public assistance. Participants felt that participation in ESL classes included improving oneself and one's personal effectiveness in United States society, being better able to help one's children with their homework and to speak to their teachers, improving one's employability by being able to get a better job or to enter job training. One participant said: "My children are American and English is the language that I use to help them with their homework, especially my son who is having problems with math. English is backwards, like in the case of House White [White House], I have to say it backwards."

The above findings confirm the findings of previous studies, which have consistently found a significant relationship among cultural, linguistic, and educational factors (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Fowler – Frey, 1996; Ogbu, 1994; Weinstein – Shr, 1993). In this study, second language acquisition, culture shock and language stress of adult female Latinas appeared to be predictors of adjustments. Factors of language, culture, and

education have affected the development of attitudes toward adjustments.

Implications

There are implications that arise from the study. Adult Hispanic women with lack of English language proficiency expressed difficulties in their linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences to life in the United States. They experienced challenges in their role of raising children, a lack of understanding of English, and a desire to be a successful individual. The lives of these participants were changed by moving to the United States. Relationships with kin and community were disrupted, as were culturally valued ways of connecting themselves to family life in a new country.

Immigrant, non-English background families living under low socioeconomic levels have cultural-linguistic literacy needs as well as daily living needs. We need to explore ways in which programs providing adult ESL literacy training can be made more sensitive and accessible to immigrant families. Programs must acknowledge the existing cultural-linguistic capital possessed by adult Hispanic women, while at the same time assisting families in acquiring new cultural, linguistic and educational knowledge; more

emphasis should be placed in pursuing community-based literacy programs serving immigrant families that are dedicated to their children and their personal educational growth (Da Vanzo, Hawes-Dawson, Valdez & Vernez, 1994; Fingeret & Danin, 1991).

The essential variable in participants' success centered on the impact of the immediate family. Essays, questionnaires, and observations all reiterated that the family environment, particularly that of the child/mother relationship, was the pivotal element determining academic success or failure. Research studies (Duran & Szymanski, 1995; Floriani, 1994; Wrigley & Guth, 1992) assert that children's motivation to succeed in school is influenced by the educational achievement of their mothers. Parental involvement in their children's schools influences student achievement, attendance, motivation, self-esteem and behavior. Parents who read to their children have books in their homes; they exhibit high achievement goals for their children who tend to have high achievers than parents who do not.

Conclusions

This study identified linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences of adult Latina ESL students in New York City.

Tangential to this research is the development of strategies for English language instruction designed to meet specific needs of Latino language ESL students. Future research should identify other factors affecting adjustment. One of those variables should be the role of ESL programs in maintaining the level of interest and motivation in this population.

Every adult ESL class is multilevel; learners begin with ranging degrees of competencies and educational backgrounds. They also show different rates in each of the language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Wrigley & Guth, 1992). However, in many adult ESL classes, there are even more variables that affect the levels within the class. Some programs (generally because of funding constraints, learner scheduling difficulties, and number of learners and program logistics) place learners of all levels, from beginning to advanced, in a single class. Additionally, learners have varying degrees of literacy in their first language as well as in English (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). It is recommended that future descriptive studies should give more attention to other factors that add diversity in the classroom and rate progress in learning English such as type and amount of learners' previous education, learning style preferences,

learner expectations of appropriate classroom activities, and culture of each learner. Descriptive studies should also be carried out with other successful students in other geographic locations to determine if similar findings will result.

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